ARCHIVE INTERVIEWS

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Former premier of South Australia, Lynn Arnold, is holding the latest edition of *Eternity* when he greets me in the offices of St Peter's Anglican Cathedral in Adelaide, where he now serves as a minister. As we sit down to tea, Lynn tells me he's recently had pause to reflect on his life, and how it all fits together.

Lynn was just 30 when he was elected to represent the district of Salisbury, in Adelaide's northern suburbs. He served in the South Australian parliament for the next 15 years, in portfolios including Education, Tertiary Education, Agriculture and State Development, and then as Labor leader and premier.

From an early age Lynn had a keen interest in politics, and quips that as a teen his most enjoyable Saturday night only happened once every three years – on election night. He says his interest stemmed from the fact that "you actually have a chance to make a difference. The world will be better for good politics."

From day one, Lynn was clear about where his allegiances lay. In 1979, when Lynn was being sworn into parliament as a new member, he elected to affirm his allegiance to the Crown (a requirement of all members of parliament), rather

than swearing an oath on the Bible, saying, “I didn’t swear on the Bible because I’m a Christian ... [the Bible says] your word should be your word.”

That was the first of many times when Lynn’s faith would inform his decisions inside parliament.

Over the course of his 15 years in parliament Lynn crossed the floor (voted against his own party) a number of times over issues including Sunday trading of hotels, the introduction of a casino, poker machines, and the legalisation of marijuana.

Lynn’s dissent on these and other issues was informed by his Christian convictions, but he doesn’t believe that disagreement between his “values frame” and the Labor Party policies should have meant that he found a different party to affiliate with.

“What you need to do in politics is find the party that best fits your values frame,” says Lynn. “But no party will ever totally fit your values frame, unless it’s just a party of one.

“So you have to go for the best fit. And that means sometimes it will not fit. You have to then determine how serious the non-fit is. Most of the time it’s going to be a bit unimportant ... but on other occasions it will be fundamental. And then you have to determine whether you can stay [with the party], or is there a means by which you can have your say that you don’t agree?”

Sometimes “having your say” means crossing the floor, and voting against your own party, and sometimes even against your own electorate, as Lynn found out.

“I knew that my own electorate disagreed with me on these issues,” says Lynn.

“Popular opinion amongst my own electorate was in favour of a casino, in favour of poker machines, and in favour of the legalisation of marijuana.

“[But MPs are] elected to be responsible and make decisions as they see best, and then they get tested against that at the next election, and the electorate can throw them out. So I openly told my electorate what I was doing, and I said I respected their full right to disagree and vote me out. In fact they didn’t; they kept on re-electing me, and I ended up going of my own resignation, not by being defeated.”

Lynn’s own Christian faith is a fascinating blend of a number of Christian traditions.

Raised in a home with a “Christian ethos,” Lynn says that from a young age he had a “social justice bent”. In response to that, his parents suggested that he might look at Quakerism, a form of Christianity heavily focused on pacifism and social justice. He borrowed the only book on Quakers from the local library, loved what he read, and in his first year of university began attending Quaker meetings in Adelaide.

“I fell in love with the idea of silently waiting on the Lord, and having a commitment to a Monday religion – a relationship with God is not just about a relationship with God on a Sunday, it’s about being impelled by that to do something on a Monday,” says Lynn.

In the end, Lynn says that he returned to his Anglican roots, largely because it was difficult for five small children to remain silent during the Quaker meetings.

“But I still draw a lot of strength out of silent prayer and silent waiting upon the Lord. But I also draw lots of strength out of all the other forms of Christian liturgical expression,” says Lynn.